

Companion Guide

How to Determine Whether Each Signal Exists

Purpose

This companion document helps interpret the signals in the *Are We in a Recovery Window?* self-check. It supports consistent, evidence-based judgment by clarifying what each signal may look like in practice.

This is not an evaluation of the leader. It is a reference to reduce misinterpretation and overreaction.

A. Signals About Confidence and Perception

1. Feedback themes are repeating without visible, sustained change

What this looks like in practice:

- The same themes appear across multiple feedback cycles, 360s, or informal conversations
- Language shifts slightly, but the core concern remains unchanged
- Stakeholders acknowledge effort but still say “it hasn’t landed” or “it’s not consistent”

What does not qualify:

- New feedback themes emerging as scope expands
- One-off comments without pattern
- Improvement that is recent but has not yet had time to stabilize

Evidence sources:

- Prior 360 summaries
- Performance reviews
- HR notes or manager recollections
- Language consistency across time

2. Concerns about credibility or style are being discussed privately

What this looks like in practice:

- Side conversations before or after meetings
- Feedback shared with HR but not directly with the leader
- Phrases like “off the record,” “between us,” or “I would not say this to her”

What does not qualify:

- Direct, transparent feedback given openly
- Normal disagreement or dissent
- Isolated personality preference

Evidence sources:

- HR conversations
- Sponsor disclosures
- Repeated informal signals from different stakeholders

3. Stakeholders express unease even when results are acceptable

What this looks like in practice:

- “The numbers are fine, but...”
- Results are achieved, but confidence does not increase
- Language focuses on risk, sustainability, or downstream impact

What does not qualify:

- Temporary performance volatility
- Discomfort with change or new leadership
- General anxiety unrelated to the leader

Evidence sources:

- Executive discussions
- Board or senior team commentary
- Risk framing language in meetings

4. Confidence in the leader is narrowing, not expanding

What this looks like in practice:

- Fewer visible endorsements or advocacy moments
- Reduced inclusion in future-focused conversations
- Increased scrutiny of decisions that were previously trusted

What does not qualify:

- Stable confidence without active promotion
- Short-term tension during change initiatives
- Normal adjustment periods

Evidence sources:

- Meeting participation patterns
- Sponsorship behavior
- Informal influence mapping

B. Signals About Sponsorship and Patience

5. Sponsorship feels conditional or cautious

What this looks like in practice:

- Support framed with caveats
- Phrases like “we’ll see,” “for now,” or “as long as”

- Sponsor avoids public advocacy

What does not qualify:

- Thoughtful but clear sponsorship
- High standards applied consistently
- Normal performance expectations

Evidence sources:

- Sponsor language
- Visibility of support
- Willingness to intervene on the leader's behalf

6. The leader is being “supported,” but expectations are not explicit

What this looks like in practice:

- Coaching offered without clear success criteria
- Support framed as help, not accountability
- Leader unsure what success actually looks like

What does not qualify:

- Explicit development plans
- Clearly defined performance goals
- Time-bound expectations

Evidence sources:

- Coaching mandates
- Development plans
- Leader understanding checks

7. HR has been asked to monitor, coach, or stabilize the situation

What this looks like in practice:

- HR involvement increases without formal escalation
- Language like “keep an eye on this” or “support quietly”
- HR becomes intermediary rather than process owner

What does not qualify:

- Routine HR partnership
- Formal performance processes
- Normal onboarding or transition support

Evidence sources:

- HR role expansion
- Informal requests from leadership
- Lack of formal framing

8. Time and goodwill feel compressed

What this looks like in practice:

- Less tolerance for missteps
- Faster escalation of issues
- Pressure to show change quickly

What does not qualify:

- Normal urgency tied to business cycles
- High-performance environments with consistent standards
- Crisis unrelated to the leader

Evidence sources:

- Escalation speed
- Language around patience
- Shifts in tolerance thresholds

C. Signals About Organizational Behaviour

9. Alternatives or successors have been quietly discussed

What this looks like in practice:

- Succession conversations occur without informing the leader
- “If this doesn’t work” scenarios discussed
- External benchmarking begins

What does not qualify:

- Routine succession planning
- Transparent talent discussions
- Long-term pipeline conversations

Evidence sources:

- Leadership conversations
- Talent reviews
- Confidential disclosures

10. Decision-makers are asking “Can this work?” rather than “How do we help?”

What this looks like in practice:

- Shift from developmental language to viability language
- Focus on risk rather than growth
- Questions framed around outcomes rather than support

What does not qualify:

- Healthy challenge during development
- Stretch role discussions
- Capability-building conversations

Evidence sources:

- Executive meeting language
- Framing of discussions
- Nature of questions asked

11. Intervention has been suggested without clear success criteria

What this looks like in practice:

- Coaching, mentoring, or assessments proposed as default
- No agreement on what “better” looks like
- No defined timeline or decision points

What does not qualify:

- Structured interventions with clear outcomes
- Explicit development plans
- Formal performance management

Evidence sources:

- Intervention mandates
- Sponsor clarity
- Documentation gaps

12. The situation feels urgent but poorly defined

What this looks like in practice:

- Pressure to act without clarity
- Discomfort with naming the real issue
- Multiple, conflicting interpretations

What does not qualify:

- Well-defined crises
- Clearly articulated performance gaps
- Transparent decision processes

Evidence sources:

- Conflicting narratives
- Lack of shared framing
- Repeated rehashing without resolution